

## **RHODE ISLAND SENIOR FARMERS MARKET PROGRAM**

The RI Division of Agriculture received a USDA grant of \$198,551 in 2004 to implement a Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program at RI Farmers Markets. Coupons were distributed free of charge to 13,000 low income Seniors at 42 Senior Center meal sites in cooperation with the RI Department of Elderly Affairs (who also provided nutritional instruction/education to Seniors on the importance of consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables). Redemption rates were expected in the range of 50 to 60 percent, however RI Seniors redeemed 82% of coupons (42, 476 coupons) for fresh fruits and vegetables at 20 state and private farmers markets, and several traveling farmers markets coordinated by the Division of Agriculture on thirteen occasions at a total of 8 Senior Centers in RI. In addition to the nutritional benefits to seniors from fresh fruit and vegetables consumption, redeemed coupons provided over \$212,000 in income to a total of 45 participating farmers, and is a key component of the Department's farm viability objectives and program. Many seniors established season long buying relationships with farmers at markets after the initial coupon was utilized. The \$12,000 in coupon redemptions over the grant funds in 2004 was covered by state funds on a one time basis.

USDA awarded similar grant funds to the Division of Agriculture in 2005 in the amount of \$180, 844. The decrease is due to federal budget related reductions to all participating states. Coupons are redeemable at all 22 farmers markets operating in RI in 2005, and any farm roadside stand that so requests of the Division of Agriculture. Traveling farmers markets will again be arranged at a selected number of Senior Centers in 2005.